

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Grand Canyon vs Saint Mary's

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena

Grand Canyon Lopes

Bryce Drew

Tyon Grant-Foster

Ray Harrison

Gabe McGlothan

Media Conference



GABE McGLOTHAN: I think it's just the maturity of being here last year. Of course, playing Gonzaga first round, it teaches you a lot of things. So carrying that, even the momentum from last year, and having that mindset of understanding that it's just another basketball game and we just go to out there and play, play for each other and play our game and take it to 'em.

RAY HARRISON: I feel like it's just something that is to our advantage. Last year, I can speak for myself being out there, it was -- I was just thankful to be there, but this year it's a little bit different. I'm thankful to be here as well, but we got goals, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll get started with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Happy Thursday, guys. What does this moment mean and what does this say about the program that this is the third trip since 2021 and just seeing this on the rise and being part of this ride for the Lopes, each of you, if you could answer, please.

TYON GRANT-FOSTER: I just feel like it means a lot, just because of all the work that Coach Drew and the coaching staff have put in recruiting players and just the system that they put in to let us go out there and play. So I feel like that just helps us a lot with the winning.

RAY HARRISON: As far as what it means for our program, I feel like it's just a blessing. I feel like we have set out to accomplish a goal and now that we are here, it's a blessing. We're thankful for it.

GABE McGLOTHAN: Yeah, being here three out of four years, it's a blessing and I think it speaks to exactly what GCU wants to do and our mindset towards it all, where we want to make this is place where we can come regularly. We're proving that step by step, and so very excited to be a part of GCU and just blessed for the mindset that we all have.

Q. Ray and Gabe, what did the experience of last year mean as far as coming into tomorrow to play a game of this magnitude now and having that experience and how is that going to be helping you guys?

Q. I'm curious your thoughts on St. Mary's style. They obviously play slower than a lot of teams, don't shoot as many threes, I think second ranked scoring defense in the country. What do you see unique about them as you prepare for this game?

GABE McGLOTHAN: They're very talented in scoring in under 10 seconds. They're one of the best in the nation at doing that, so it means that we have to be very disciplined in our defense. I think we can hang our hat on who we are with our defense, but it's just making sure we follow through for the whole 30 seconds. Then the other thing they do is they just play aggressive, so you got to be aggressive.

Q. If you could just speak to the significance of being here, given everything you've been through and the health issues you've had. What's that mean for you to be on this stage playing in this game, given everything on your journey?

TYON GRANT-FOSTER: It means a lot, actually. Just like I'm super blessed to be here just because like everything that has happened in my life and I just can't do nothing but thank God and like that's -- it's just like a blessing just to be here. I appreciate these two guys next to me because they accepted me coming to Grand Canyon and that's why we are here today.

Q. With the success that your program has had and



not being ranked in the AP top 25, does that mean anything to you guys?

GABE McGLOTHAN: I would say, honestly, not really. It would be a cool experience, of course. You know, that would be, for especially my senior year, something that I would have enjoyed to have. But ultimately I know the people I have on my side and I'm confident in them. I know they're top 25 to me. So that's what I'm going to ride with, is I got my top 25, AP can keep theirs, and we'll just show what we can do in this tournament.

RAY HARRISON: It definitely doesn't bother me. It was a goal of ours as well and some goals you reach, some you don't. But yeah, it wasn't something that we were heartbroken about or anything like that, no.

TYON GRANT-FOSTER: I just feel like it really doesn't matter. Like they said, I feel like we played teams that were top-25 competitors and we showed what we can do. So I feel like it doesn't really mean anything. We know we can play with the best of them.

Q. Curious, since you guys have touched down here, knowing that it's Zags country and you're playing St. Mary's, have you heard a lot of fans, you might not know about GCU, where you came from, where you are, but you have the backing, by proxy, of anti-St. Mary's fans. Have you guys experienced that yet?

RAY HARRISON: We actually just did, yeah. We actually just did on the way. We were practicing at an elementary school and on the way in, all of the kids were chanting, Beat St. Mary's, and they had on Gonzaga gear. It was cool.

Q. The circle of family and your support group, if you guys have family/friends traveling from out of state or out of Washington to make it to a game tomorrow, if each of you have someone on the way or people on the way?

TYON GRANT-FOSTER: Yeah, I have my cousins and one of my big brothers coming out here, so that's pretty nice, fun, exciting.

GABE McGLOTHAN: I have my parents and then my cousins as well, so it's nice.

RAY HARRISON: I'm here by my lonely, but...

No, I still -- I mean, all my friends, family, they've all reached out to me and let me know that they're with me in spirit, and that means a lot to me.

Q. In preparation for this, do you draw more on coming to the tournament with KU several years ago or what these guys experienced to help prepare you for this tournament with Ray and Gabe's experience?

TYON GRANT-FOSTER: I feel like this tournament is -- actually, I feel like this means more, just because, like, my journey and everything and then, like, how they all accepted me and believed in me here. So I feel like this means a whole lot more than the one COVID year with KU.

Q. The fans, they travel so well. You guys experienced it in the WAC tournament. That was almost a home game for you guys. Talk about how that helps in these neutral-site games.

GABE McGLOTHAN: I would say just having community and having support pretty much everywhere you go is a blessing. It helps us stay locked in, know what we're playing for, and gives us motivation during the games. And I'm pretty sure it can be pretty daunting for the other team too. I mean, they wreak havoc. That's why they're called the Havocs, so...

Q. What do you see in sort of the perseverance he's displayed to get to get to this point given everything he's been through? It's been a different journey for him.

RAY HARRISON: I've spoke about this before, but just being able to have him here and be able to witness his story, it's a blessing. I feel like anybody who is a fan of sports or really any type of comeback story, I feel like you are able to look at him as an individual and just appreciate what he's been through.

GABE McGLOTHAN: Yeah, I would say if there was one word, it would be resilient for Tyon. He's taken hits, he's, of course, gone down, but there's one thing he'll never do and that's never quit. So having him as a teammate, I know that's the same exact mindset I can rely on. He's never going to quit on us, he's never going to quit on himself. Then just his outlook on life after that. You know, he sees life in technicolor, so it's a wonderful teammate to have.

Q. Curious, for all of you guys, since Coach Drew is kind of in the history books for his shot several years ago, what has he shared with you from his experience and have you seen him turn it up a notch, given it's this time of year from where he was part of?

GABE McGLOTHAN: Honestly, no. I think just that is his experience, not really turning it up a notch. I mean, he's always going. The cream always rises to the top, but that is the main thing because what you do every day becomes

your habits. He's very consistent, he's a very habit-driven man, and we can rely on him being the same Coach Drew every single day.

RAY HARRISON: I would agree with Gabe. I feel like he doesn't really talk about it to us. We know about it, but I guess that's just him being humble or, yeah.

TYON GRANT-FOSTER: Yeah, I would agree with what Ray said. I feel like it's just him being humble because if it was me, I'm definitely telling people about the shot I made. So I feel like that's just him being humble. But I feel like he wants us to make our own history with him as well, so I feel like that's another reason why he doesn't talk about it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We appreciate the time.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take some questions.

BRYCE DREW: Really excited to be back in the tournament, third time in four years. A lot of our players have played in the NCAA before, so it's a little bit of a different feeling. The excitement feeling never goes away. Really thankful to be here, and I know our guys have been looking forward to play this week and I can't wait to get out there on Friday and start.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Last year, even maybe three years ago, when you got in, are you doing anything different the day before or leading up to the game maybe just to change it up?

BRYCE DREW: Same routine. We have, again, guys, I think, now that are more familiar with the routine. Obviously, they're very locked in. We have a lot of guys, this is their last time around, and they want to be able to give their best and have their best performance tomorrow night.

Q. This is being portrayed as a battle of styles. How big do you see the contrast between those two?

BRYCE DREW: Yeah, we heard St. Mary's is going to fastbreak all game and shoot under 10 seconds, so we were excited about that (smiling).

But in all seriousness, they're one of the best executing teams in the country. They take good shots, they don't turn the ball over. Then defensively, I think they're extremely underrated. They don't get talked about their defense, but you don't win as many games or championships as they do

without really defending. They're really physical on defense. So they present a lot of issues in a lot of different ways. For us, we've played teams that play fast, we've played teams that play slow. I think we just want to play well and play as well as we can on both ends and whatever the score is, high or low, be in a position to win.

Q. I know the goal is to make it back to Phoenix in a couple weeks, but what would just getting this first NCAA tournament win for the program mean for you and what this program is building?

BRYCE DREW: Yeah, very thankful. I think the Lord's really blessed our university. Our program's been blessed the last four years. And to be on this stage and have this opportunity, we want to make the most of it. We think our school's really special, and we think our fan base is the best in the country, and this will be a great way, I think, more people can just recognize how fantastic GCU is.

So we know what's ahead of us we, know how hard this task is to play against St. Mary's, and we're hoping to make Lope Nation proud.

Q. We can't talk to you in March without talking about your experience. How often do you flash back to that time, talk about that time with your players or family, or is it just a long, distant memory now?

BRYCE DREW: Yeah, it's a long, distant memory, but it's still a great memory. Very thankful for the platform to be able to speak about it. Never thought it would be occurring 25 years later, but I think that's what makes the tournament so special. There's so many memories here that get intact for years to come and I think our players and other players playing in the tournament today all realize that and that's why you see so many great efforts.

Q. Ray Harrison had an unbelievable run last year in the WAC tournament to help get you to this tournament. What have you seen from him this year and maybe in a slightly different role?

BRYCE DREW: Really proud of Ray. I think as a coach you're proud of your players and different things that they do and improvements they have made. He's had to probably sacrifice more than anyone on the team. Last year he scored a lot, he had the ball in his hands, he took a lot of shots. This year we really asked him to be the quarterback. We've asked him to shoot when he's open. We've also asked him to run the offense and get other guys involved more often.

So he's kind of taken on the responsibility, whatever it takes to win that game, and that's a big change from how

he played last year. I think he's gotten so much better at it. He's so much a better player. A lot of our success goes to him and his heart to serve our team and sacrifice for the betterment of everybody.

Q. Your family is so filled with basketball. Talk about the family dynamic that you've had over the past couple years with your dad and your brother and what he's been able to do as well.

BRYCE DREW: Yeah, pretty remarkable. My dad made a Sweet 16, played in several tournaments. My brother won a National Championship. So no pressure on little brother with all they have done (smiling). But it's a blessing for me to have the resources to be able to call and talk, and my brother's played against a lot of teams across the country, different styles in this modern era. So to get his input and his advice really helps me.

Q. You mentioned St. Mary's execution. What makes their defense so good? Why do they hold teams so low?

BRYCE DREW: Really physical. I think they're physical on the ball, they're physical off the ball on your cutters, they have really good positional size, and they have really good experience and what they do, they do well. They don't mix things up, they don't play zone, they don't press. What they do, they're really, really good at, and you have to beat 'em at them being their best.

So it's definitely a challenge. It's a challenge to guard 'em, but it's also a challenge to try to get a quality shot every time down.

Q. Gabe described Tyon as resilient. Can you kind of speak to his journey and how he's been shaped by everything he's been through?

BRYCE DREW: Really remarkable. Sat out of basketball for two years. Again, had the heart condition. He's been fearless, and that's probably one of the biggest things I've admired about him, is never once has he had ever any doubt about playing or thought about his condition. Pretty much from day one he's been fearless getting on the ground, attacking the rim, taking contact. It's just really remarkable, his mental toughness and his approach that he's coming to the season with.

And then being out for two years, there's been no rust. He started out game one and started scoring the ball, which kind of to our amazement we thought it would take some time to see him be at his best, but he was pretty much from day one spectacular for us.

Q. I don't know if you heard earlier this week, but a couple of the Gonzaga players were suggesting that maybe the fans who were coming on -- coming tomorrow night show up in purple, being the rivalry that they have with St. Mary's. I know you guys have a great fan base that travels, but in these neutral site situations, the sort of the passive neutral fan that's here, can that make a difference having them just sort of get on the side of the underdog in these situations?

BRYCE DREW: We've definitely felt it. We went out to eat last night and we stepped in the restaurant and people are saying, Beat St. Mary's. And we went to an elementary school today and we had the elementary kids, as our players are walking in, saying, Beat St. Mary's. So that rivalry is real out here. It only took us a little bit of time around people to realize how serious that rivalry is.

Q. I think it was Gabe earlier this week mentioned he's never seen you shoot a basketball. So my question is: How often do you hoop? And the guy who hit the shot doesn't shoot anymore, is that true?

BRYCE DREW: Yeah, I know, these hands and stuff, they're more for coaching, not shooting now. I do shoot some, so Gabe was maybe protecting me a little bit. But I'll shoot with my son. One thing I think as a former player is I focus on these guys, and so it's not about me shooting or doing things like that. My job as a coach is to get them better, get them prepared for games. So ever since day one this has kind of been my approach and now through the years, I'm just out of shape and not as good, so we don't want them to remove any doubt that they thought that maybe I could shoot. We're going to just floor it and keep it there.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach.

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